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DE RUEHGB #0201/01 0251252
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FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 5371
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000201

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/24/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [PINR](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: SALIH TO CODEL: "PLEASE DON'T PULL THE PLUG ON
THIS MISSION"

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih on January 15 urged Codel Davis (Reps. Lincoln Davis (D-TN), Tim Walberg (R-MI), John Barrow (D-GA), Marsha Blackburn (R-TN), Brad Miller (D-NC) and Niki Tsongas (D-MA)) against a precipitous U.S. withdrawal from Iraq. He enumerated security gains in 2007 and signs of hope for political and economic improvement in 2008. Salih said the majority of both Iraqi politicians and citizens would fear a U.S. withdrawal, harsh rhetoric notwithstanding, and estimated U.S. forces could fall back to a supporting role in security within two to three years. The DPM warned that every neighboring country has "a dog in this fight," arguing the best thing for Iraq would be for all of them to eschew intervention. End summary.

Hope For Political, Economic Gains in 2008

¶2. (C) Salih opened the meeting by explaining that he values meeting members of Congress because it allows him to explain the complexities of Iraq,s situation. Iraq,s liberation unleashed powerful conflicting forces, but many Iraqis are trying to build a democracy and have made major progress by any standard. Al Qa,ida lost in Anbar because the population rejected it, not because the GOI or US had ordered them out, and the event thus marked the genesis by a native Muslim population of Al Qa,ida,s global defeat. Salih argued that Iraqi security forces have made huge strides since 2004; while he expressed reluctance to set timelines, he estimated that U.S. troops could withdraw to a supporting role within two to three years at most. Furthermore, Iraqi political actors are ready for more serious political dialogue despite their ongoing disputes, and the shift of fighting from the street to the political system and Iraq,s free press is itself an encouraging sign.

¶3. (C) Rep. Lincoln Davis (D-TN) argued that no country can exist without robust commerce, financial institutions, roads and other infrastructure, and service delivery, and asked Salih if he envisions an Iraqi system of governance in which commerce can flourish. Salih said the economy had improved modestly in 2007, and would improve more in 2008 thanks to the largest Iraqi budget ever. Referencing Iraq,s plentiful natural resources, Salih said he told Kurdish students "this is a country I don,t want to leave."

Combating Extremism and Anti-U.S. Sentiment

¶4. (C) Rep. Marsha Blackburn (R-TN) declared that she and Salih share constituencies, due to the expatriate Kurdish population of Nashville. She pushed back on Salih,s reluctance to set timelines, explaining that she learned their value in solving problems during her previous career in marketing. She asked how the GOI is ensuring that young Iraqi women are choosing a life of freedom and a life of

liberty, as opposed to choosing a system that gives absolute power to a dictator or religious extremist. Salih responded that this is the most important question of all. Islamic fundamentalism is a problem across the Arab world, which Salih attributed to an "angry generation" arising from fifty years of dictatorship in many Arab countries. He cited Egypt, where much of the population is hostile to its government and the west despite U.S. annual aid in the billions of dollars, and said supporting democratizing Muslim societies like Iraq or Kosovo is a much better investment.

¶5. (C) Rep. Brad Miller (D-NC) asked about Iraqi public opinion on the U.S. presence, noting that polls suggest overwhelming opposition, and that even the majority of the COR had called for a U.S. withdrawal. Salih conceded that there would always be impulsive distaste for foreign troops on one's soil, but that if the U.S. announced its imminent military withdrawal, the public would urge troops to stay for the sake of stability. Similarly, politicians criticize the U.S. to score points with their constituents, but no serious Iraqi leaders except the Sadrists oppose a long-term U.S. security presence. Salih added an earnest plea for continued U.S. engagement in Iraq, saying "please don't pull the plug on this mission."

¶6. (C) Rep. Miller asked about Iranian and Turkish interference in Iraq. Salih responded that all of Iraq's neighbors have major stakes in the outcome of Iraq's internal struggles, and that the best thing would be for none to interfere. Turkey lacks the necessary leverage to manipulate Iraqi domestic politics, but is intervening militarily, albeit out of legitimate security concerns. Salih asked Ambassador Crocker about the status of U.S.-Iran talks, which the Ambassador said Iran had backed away from

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but is welcome to restart any time.

¶7. (U) Codel Davis did not have the opportunity to clear this cable.
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